

STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

Situation: Hostages can experience Stockholm Syndrome.

On August 23, 1973, a Swedish ex-convict named Jan Erik "Janne" Olsson seized control of the lobby of the Kreditbanken, a bank in the central square in Stockholm, Sweden. When police arrived, Olsson opened fire, and seized four hostages. He then demanded that his ex-cellmate and friend, Clark Olofsson, be brought to the bank, along with 3 million Swedish Kronor (worth US \$730,000 in 1973), two guns, bulletproof vests, helmets, and a car.



Swedish authorities agreed to bring Olofsson, and communication was established with police negotiators. The robbers locked the hostages in a vault while they waited for their demands to be met. Swedish authorities eventually offered them a get-away car but refused to let them take the hostages with them.

The hostage crisis unfolded only days before a national election and while King Gustav VI Adolf lay dying at the royal palace of Sweden. Trying to exploit the approaching election, Olofsson called Prime Minister Olof Palme and threatened to kill the hostages, and then took a stranglehold on a female hostage who was heard screaming as he hung up.



The next day Prime Minister Palme received another call, this one from a hostage named Kristin Ehnemark. She said she was very displeased with his attitude, and asked him to let the robbers and the hostages leave. Ehnemark said she trusted the robbers but feared the police might attempt a violent assault on the bank.

The atmosphere in the vault was generally not threatening, except when the captors were panicked by the threat of police action. Consequently, the hostages came to see their captors as reasonable and the police as the source of danger. The hostages clearly sympathized with their captors, a pattern which

criminologist Nils Bejerot named the "Stockholm Syndrome."

On August 26, the police drilled a hole into the main vault from the apartment above. Through this hole they were able to feed a camera and obtain photos of the hostages and robbers in the vault. Seeing this, Olsson opened fire and threatened to kill all the hostages if the police used gas. To complicate police planning, Olsson tied the hostages to safety deposit boxes with nooses around their necks so that they would be strangled by their own weight if the police attacked with gas and they fell unconscious.

Despite this threat, the police used tear gas on August 28 and within half-an-hour the robbers surrendered with no injuries.

Olsson and Olofsson received prison sentences for their assault on the bank and hostage taking. During his 10-year prison term, Olsson received many admiring letters from women who found him attractive and he later married one of them.



Clark Olofsson lived a life of violent crime both before and after the events in 1973.

However, he claimed he did not help Olsson and was only trying to save the hostages by keeping the situation calm and was eventually acquitted on appeal. He later befriended one of the hostages, Kristin Ehnemark, and they occasionally met and their families became friendly.

One myth about the incident is that the hostages became romantically involved with their captors. Kristin Ehnemark and Clark Olofsson became friends, and Jan Olsson married one of his female admirers, but there were no romantic relationships between anyone present during the robbery attempt. Nevertheless, the sympathy these hostages demonstrated toward their captors has inspired much psychological investigation and analysis.

This odd attachment to one's captor has become known as the Stockholm Syndrome. Experts have identified four contributing factors:

- 1) Perceived threat to survival
- 2) Perceived small kindness from the captor (for example, letting the captive live)
- 3) Isolation from perspectives other than those of the captor
- 4) Perceived inability to escape (creating a sense of shared destiny)

Captives can form an abnormal attachment to their captor as a defense mechanism and begin to see the world from their captor's perspective. This can reduce their ability to see opportunities to escape or increase their own safety.